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AUTHOR Sutherland, E. R.; Thomas, Hollie B.
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ABSTRACT

Expectations about jobs held by 77 undergraduates in the Leisure Services and Studies Department at Florida State University were studied. A basis for the study was the finding that 10-60 percent of leisure services practitioners leave the field within 2 years of graduation. It was hypothesized that the students' expectations about job characteristics would be different from reality. While 55 percent expected to be employed in a resort-commercial type agency, only 8.5 percent of the graduates were employed by this type of agency. Approximately 49 percent stated a desire to assume a programming position, while only 26 percent of the graduates were employed in a position of this nature. Followup discussions with students in this area suggested a concept of the field of practice to be one of distinct job specialization with little overlapping of duties. The expectations of current students concerning their initial salary indicates a third area of possible dissatisfaction with their employment in the field. Present students underestimated the possibility of their being employed in a position paying less than $10,000. Students held expectations of salaries that were higher than they were likely to obtain. (SW)

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Towards an Explanation of Leisure Services Practitioner Attrition: A Comparison of Recreation/Leisure Undergraduates' Expectations of Certain Job Characteristics and the Reality of These Job Characteristics.

E.R. Sutherland
Malaspina College

Hollie B. Thomas
The Florida State University

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ABSTRACT

This study, founded in the theoretical concept of the Porter-Lawler Motivation Model (Porter-Lawler, 1968), was designed to determine if the level of expectancy of Undergraduate Leisure/ Recreation Students, with regard to certain job characteristics, was different than what may be found in reality.

Data were gathered from Undergraduates in the Leisure Services and Studies Department at The Florida State University and subjected to an X^2 test using data previously gathered from Department Graduates as expected frequencies.

Discrepancies were found between what undergraduates are likely to encounter in reality and their expectations of the type of agency in which they hoped to be employed; the nature of the position held within the agency and the salary for the position.

Areas for further study were suggested.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Follow-up studies of recently graduated Leisure Services practitioners identify that from ten percent to sixty percent of students graduating from Leisure Services programs leave the field of practice within two years of graduating (Hobart, 1977; Greiner, 1978; Cannon, 1977). Such attrition rates are of concern to the colleges and universities presently engaged in the preparation of students for careers in the Leisure Services field (Dunn, 1977; Godbey, 1976; Henkel, 1978). However, no studies attempting to identify factors which may be contributing to the attrition of recently graduated practitioners were identified from a review of research in the Leisure Services field.

The identification of factors leading to attrition could be approached in one of three ways. First, a follow-up student of those individuals who have left the field of practice; secondly, identifying differences between active practitioners and those who have left the field; and thirdly, comparing the expectations of preprofessionals with the realities of the field of practice. This paper reports the results of a study utilizing the third approach.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The purpose of this research was to identify differences between Leisure Services undergraduates' expectations of the field of practice and the reality of that field. Specifically the research was conducted to determine whether undergraduate students in the Recreation and Leisure Services Program at The Florida State University have a level of expectancy regarding their intitial job placement which is different from what they are likely to encounter in reality.

3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The rationale for believing that differences in perception and reality may contribute to practitioner attrition is based on the results of studies on the Expectation Theory (Vroom, 1964; Fishbein, 1975; James and Hones, 1980; and Schneider, 1975) and more specifically of the Porter-Lawler Motivation Model (Porter and Lawler, 1968).

It may be suggested that the attrition of the Recreation/Leisure practitioners may be accounted for by the holding of inappropriate "role perception" at the undergraduate level resulting in "perceived equitable rewards" greater than those available in the field. (See Figure I)

Studies supporting the relationship between perceived job characteristics and job satisfaction are regularly reported in literature (Voydanoff, 1978, 1980; Dieterly, 1974; Fishbein, 1975;

Hackman, 1971; Lawler, 1970; Solonick, 1977; Stone, 1976; Vanous, 1974). James' and Jones' (1980) synthesis of these studies concludes that "job perceptions and job satisfactions are reciprocally and dynamically related." (James and Jones, 1980, p. 127)

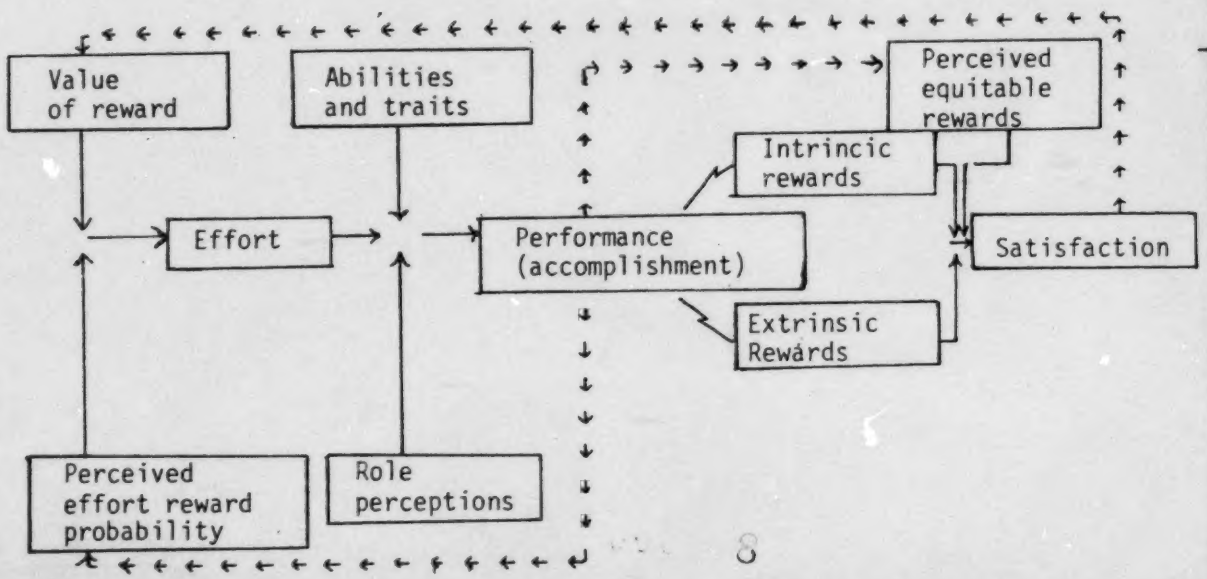
4. STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis was formulated:-

> The expectation of undergraduate students in the Leisure Services and Studies Department of The Florida State University with regard to certain characteristics of their perceived "first job" will be different from the reality of that "first job."

The rationale for the formulated hypothesis is based in the Porter-Lawler Model (Figure I). It may be argued from the model that the "Effort" (more closely associated with motivation than performance in the model) of the undergraduates is the result of

Figure I: The Porter-Lawler Motivation Model



their perception of "Value of Reward" and "Perceived Effort-Reward Probability." However, since in the case of students there is no actual feedback from "Performance (accomplishment)" or "Satisfaction," the students must rely on incomplete and inaccurate data with which to establish their perceptions. This inaccuracy of available data may result in their perception of equitable reward being greater than those found in reality. A significant difference between reality and perception could account for dissatisfaction and subsequent attrition from the field of practice.

5. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF VARIABLES

For the purpose of this study the following operational definitions of variables was used:-

- "expectation" will be taken as the difference (if any) between perception of reality (obtain frequencies) derived from present undergraduate students and reality (expected frequencies) derived from past undergraduate students.
- "first job" is defined as the initial full time (35 hours plus per week and lasting for at least six months) position accepted by the student after graduation from the Leisure Services and Studies Department.
- "characteristics of perceived first job" - the specific characteristics used in this study were:
    a) time frame between graduation and acceptance of intial position;
    b) type of Leisure agency offering initial position;
    c) geographic area in which intial agency is located;
    d) primary focus of the position;
    e) initial salary for position.
- "reality" - the composite results for the five characteristics from the follow-up studies of program graduates (Cannon, 1977, 1978, 1979).

6. OPERATIONAL RESTATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis formulated in this study suggest that a "difference" between reality and expectation may account for attrition of practitioners from the Leisure and Recreation field of practice. A difference between two sets of frequencies may be identified by the use of the Chi Square Test. In this study, a difference between frequency sets was recognized when X^2 exceeded the entry value of (P) at .001.

The hypothesis was operationally restated as follows:-

> The X^2 resulting from testing the observed frequencies (the percentage of those responding to each category) of the perceived "first job" for the undergraduate students in the Leisure Services and Studies Department of The Florida State University and the expected frequencies of the characteristics of "first job" in reality will exceed the entry value of (P) at .001.

7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of college and university Leisure Services programs are to provide appropriate educational experiences for students so as to adequately prepare the students to assume professional roles in the Leisure Services field. In programs where the demand for seats is greater than the supply, the efficient, effective attainment of this objective is of even greater importance. College and university Leisure Services programs appear to be attaining their major objectives (Sessoms, 1981). However, the attrition rate among recent graduates

would suggest that although the competencies necessary to successfully accomplish the tasks of the Leisure Services practitioner are attained in the college/university environment, the competencies in the affective domain may not be fully addressed.

This study was designed as a preliminary attempt to identify areas requiring further research in the hypothesized relationship between undergraduate expectation and reality. The intent of this work was to raise specific questions which could be addressed more specifically in a program of continuing research.

Although the issue addressed by this study are national in scope, the assumptions and limitations of the study restrict the application of results to any population other than the undergraduates in the Leisure Services and Studies Department of The Florida State University.

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that expectations of undergraduates and the nature of reality in the field have remained unchanged over time. This assumption implies that the expectations of those graduated students, responding to the 1977, 78, 79 studies, as undergraduates were similar to the present group of undergraduates and that the nature of the field has not changed in the same time period.

B. METHODOLOGY

1. SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were the undergraduate students in the Leisure Services and Studies Department of The Florida State University. Data were gathered from 77 of the 106 registered undergraduates in the Department (72.6% return). Two follow-up administrations of the instrument for non-respondents did not increase the response.

As no demographic data was collected on respondents, other than name and social security number, and since a review of personal files to determine sample characteristics was deemed inappropriate, the responses were deemed to be representative of all undergraduates in The Florida State Leisure Services and Studies Department.

2. PROCEDURES

The data for this study were gathered from the undergraduates during the first fifteen minutes of their classes, during the twelfth week of the fall semester. The professors in those classes being tested introduced the researcher and gave oral support to the project. The researcher, the same individual in each case, distributed the instrument to each student who had not previously responded.

Upon completion, the instruments were collected by the researcher. Respondents were informed that the results of the study would be made available to the Department faculty early in the spring semester and

that the results would be available to them through the faculty.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered from respondents was hand tabulated and subjected to a series of Chi Square Tests. Tables I through III present the results of the Chi Square Tests corresponding to the previously stated hypothesis.

C. RESULTS

Table 1: The comparison of undergraduate expectation (observed frequency) to reality (expected frequency) on 5 job characteristics.

Job Characteristics		% of Responses Reality	% of Responses Undergraduate Expectations	
Time between graduation and first position	Less than 1 month	48.6	35.9	X^2 = 24.35
	1 to 3 months	31.4	53.1	P at .001 = 16.27
	4 to 6 months	11.4	9.4	
	More than 6 months	8.6	1.6*	SIGNIFICANT
Type of agency for first position	Resort/Commerical	8.5	55.0	X^2 = 356.4
	Youth	16.9	2.7	P at .001 = 18.46
	Municipal	49.3	15.0	
	Therapeutic	23.9	16.7	SIGNIFICANT
	Other	1.4	11.6	
Geographic area of first position	Florida	63.4	63.3	X^2 = 11.6
	South East	21.1	11.7	P at .001 = 18.46
	North East	7.0	11.7	
	Central	4.2	5.0	NOT SIGNIFICANT
	Other	4.2	8.3	
Nature of first position	Direct Service	25.0	32.8	X^2 = 53.9
	Programming	26.1	49.2	P at .001 = 18.46
	Supervision	3.3	4.9	
	Administration	6.5	8.2	SIGNIFICANT
	Other	39.1	4.9	
Initial Salary**	Under $10,000	19.7	11.7	X^2 = 26.5
	$10,000 to $12,999	54.9	58.3	P at .001 = 16.27
	$13,000 to $14,999	9.9	23.3	
	$15,000 or over	15.5	6.7	SIGNIFICANT

* For discussion of acceptability of using X^2, when value of expectancy cells are less than five see:

Minium, E.W. Statistical Reasoning in Psychology and Education, 2nd edition, John Wiley and Sons, New York 1978.

or

Cockran, W.G. "Some Methods for Strengthening the Common X^2 Tests," Biometrics, Volume 10, 1954, pp. 417-451.

** Salaries from the 1977/79 study adjusted to 1981 dollars.

Significant Chi Square values were found for all job characteristics other than "geographical area." The hypothesis was rejected in that the operational restatement of the hypothesis suggested that all characteristics would have significant Chi Square values.

Although the general hypothesis of this study was rejected, the data provided valuable information. A review of the results of Table I identify three major areas of difference between undergraduate expectation and reality. In this study 55% of the undergraduates expected to be employed in the Resort/Commercial field where in fact 8.5% of program graduates were actually employed in this area. This large discrepancy between expectation and reality could lead to disappointment in attempting to secure a position in the resort commercial field.

The high proportion of students desiring to enter resort/commerical agencies could be accounted for by the apparent attractiveness (salary - physical setting) of the agency. In follow up discussions with students participating in the study the author found many instances of students habouring dreams of being the recreation director on a cruise ship or social director of a large hotel complex. The students had been introduced to some successful program graduates who had, in fact, acquired positions similar to those described above. Such meetings seem to perpetuate the "dreams" of the undergraduates.

The second area of difference between expectation and reality is that identified under the characteristic "nature of position." Close to 40% of graduated students work in a position which cannot be classified as exclusively any one of the four other descriptors in the characteristics.

Many of the present students (49.2%) state a desire to assume a programming position while only 26.1% of the graduated students are employed in a position of this nature.

Subsequent follow up discussions with students in this area tended to suggest a overall concept of the field of practice to be one of distinct job specialization with little overlapping of duties.

The expectations of present students of their initial salary indicates a third area of possible dissatisfaction with their employment in the field of recreation/leisure at the low end of the salary range; present students underestimate the possibility of their being employed in a position paying less that $10,000. At the other end of the salary range (above $13,000) present students hold expectations beyond reality, a situation which could also lead to job dissatisfaction and field attrition (Peter, 1975).

The area of renumeration for job performance was one in which students, in the follow up discussions, admitted having the greatest difficulty. They reported reading job postings where no specific salary range was indicated or where for apparently similar jobs widely differing salaries were offered.

Further analysis of the gathered data (Tables II and III) provided results of the expectations of sub populations within the general undergraduate population.

Table II: *A comparison of seniors' expectations and juniors' expectations (taken as observed frequencies) and reality (expected frequency) on 5 job characteristics.*

Job Characteristic		% of Responses Reality	Seniors	X^2 reality to seniors	Juniors	X^2 reality to juniors
Time between graduation and first position	Less than 1 month	48.6	37.7		35.1	
	1 to 3 months	31.4	55.5	X^2 = 30	47.4	X^2 = 28.75
	4 to 6 months	11.4	4.4		21.1	
	More than 6 months	8.6	2.2		0	
Type of Agency for first position	Resort/Commerical	8.5	54.8		55.6	
	Youth	16.9	2.7		0	
	Municipal	49.3	14.3	X^2 = 293.32	16.7	X^2 = 304.61
	Therapeutic	23.9	14.3		22.2	
	Other	14.	14.3		5.6	
Geographic area of first position	Florida	63.4	61.		68.4	
	South East	21.1	12.2		10.5	
	North East	7.0	12.2	X^2 = 15.29*	10.5	X^2 = 7.99*
	Central	4.2	4.9		5.25	
	Other	4.2	9.8		5.25	
Nature of position	Direct Service	25.0	35.7		25.3	
	Programming	26.1	52.4		42.1	
	Supervision	3.3	7.1	X^2 = 75	0	X^2 = 40.37
	Administration	6.5	4.8		15.8	
	Other	39.1	0		15.8	
Initial Salary	under $10,000	19.7	11.9		11.8	
	$10,000 to $12,999	54.9	54.8	X^2 = 45.78	70.6	X^2 = 13.96*
	$13,000 to $14,999	9.9	28.6		11.8	
	$15,000 or over	15.5	4.8		5.9	

P at .001 with 3df = 16.27
P at .001 with 4df = 18.46

* X^2 not significant

It would appear from visual observation of Table II that juniors, although holding expectations different from reality, have a more accurate view of reality than do seniors. There appears to be a shift in thinking between the junior and senior year.

This shift is most evident from the results in the characteristic "Nature of Position." Senior students in this case fall within the four specified areas of the characteristics and their expectations significantly differ from that of reality.

Table III: *A comparison of expectations of undergraduates with work experience and non-work experienced (taken as observed frequencies) and reality (taken as expected frequency) on 5 job characteristics.*

Job Characteristic		% of Responses: Reality	Work Experienced	X^2 Reality for Work Experienced	Non-work Experienced	X^2 Reality for non-work Experienced
Time between graduation and first position	Less than 1 month	48.6	41.9		30.3	
	1 to 3 months	31.4	51.6	$X^2 = 23.2$	54.5	$X^2 = 33.75$
	4 to 6 months	11.4	3.2		15.2	
	More than 6 months	8.6	3.2		0.0	
Type of Agency for first position	Resort/Commerical	8.5	48.3		61.2	
	Youth	16.9	2.7		0.0	
	Municipal	49.3	20.3	$X^2 = 390.25$	9.7	$X^2 = 394.1$
	Therapeutic	23.9	10.8		22.6	
	Other	1.4	16.7		6.5	
Geographic area of first position	Florida	63.4	53.3		73.3	
	South East	21.1	16.7		6.7	
	North East	7.0	13.3	$X^2 = 17.7$*	10.0	$X^2 = 14.33$*
	Central	4.2	6.7		3.3	
	Other	4.2	10.0		6.7	
Nature of position	Direct Service	25.0	33.3		32.3	
	Programming	26.1	40.0		58.1	
	Supervision	3.3	10.0	$X^2 = 52.49$	0.0	$X^2 = 77.62$
	Administration	6.5	10.0		6.5	
	Other	39.1	6.7		3.3	
Initial Salary	Under $10,000	19.7	10.0		13.8	
	$10,000 to $12,999	54.9	60.0	$X^2 = 28.38$	58.6	$X^2 = 31.85$
	$13,000 to $14,999	9.9	23.3		24.1	
	$15,000 or over	15.5	6.7		3.4	

P at .001 with 3df = 16.27
P at .001 with 4df = 18.46

* X^2 is not significant

It would appear that although their expectations as a whole are significantly different from reality, undergraduate students with work experience have a set of expectations closer to reality than do undergraduate students with no previous work experience.

D. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this research project was to test the hypothesis that, in line with the Porter-Lawler Model (Porter-Lawler, 1968), the expectancies of undergraduates in the Leisure Services and Studies Department at The Florida State University, with regard to certain job characteristics, would be different from reality. Although the hypothesis as operationally restated was rejected, differences between expectations and reality was evident from visual appraisal of the data.

In Table I the results of the Chi Square Analysis identified significant differences in the distribution was found in regard to the undergraduates' expectations of the type of agency for which they expected to work. (Type of Agency X^2 = 356.4 P at .001 = 18.46.) In this case, in excess of fifty percent of the undergraduates expected to be employed in a resort/commercial type agency where as in reality, less than ten percent of program graduates are employed in this type of agency. Differences in distribution were also found in the areas of "time between graduation and first position," "nature of the position," and "initial salary."

A second major area of unrealistic expectation was identified from testing of the hypothesis and reinforced in the testing of expectations of juniors and seniors. The belief, strengthening towards graduation, is that jobs within the recreation/leisure field are inclusive (i.e., Direct Service, Programming, etc.) and exclude the possibility of extending beyond the inclusiveness. Care was taken in the design of the questionnaire

to ensure valid and reliable responses from students in regard to the question on "Nature of Position." It would appear that the closure onto a specific type of position could create dissatisfaction when the worker is required to go beyond his/her present parameters.

Table III (work experience/non-work experience) suggests that work experience has a tempering effect on expectation. Such a finding would tend to support the inclusion of field placements; co-operative work experiences evident in many recreation/leisure curricula. The value of work experience in relationship to attrition would appear to be a possibly fruitful area for further study.

No definite conclusions may be drawn from the results of this study, certainly no application of findings to a larger population is possible. However, the findings do indicate that the expectations of undergraduate students to certain job characteristics are unrealistic. Further follow up studies will be required to determine if those students indicating high expectation do in fact leave the field of practice for which they have been trained. Further studies of these individuals are required to determine if they continue to utilize the skills acquired in their undergraduate program, or whether they undertake alternative training. Further studies of the characteristic of those leaving the field would assist those instructors/counsellors charged with the responsibility of accepting candidates into undergraduate programs.

The results of this study tend to suggest two further areas of study. The shift in expectation between junior years and senior years is a phenomenon which should be further explained. The apparent shift

away from reality by seniors would seem to make the transition from student to practitioner even more difficult.

The second area of study should be directed to the characteristics of "first position." The list of characteristics should be extended and the importance of each characteristic identified. Such a procedure would expose those characteristics having the greatest impact an attrition and would provide a guide as to where effort should be applied so as to bring undergraduates' expectations more in line with reality.

Regardless of the preliminary nature of the findings in this study, the results would suggest the necessity of instructors in Leisure Services programs assisting their students to more realistically develop expectations of the field of practice through providing accurate information on the current status of practitioners in the Leisure Services field.

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